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Clientelism and paternalism on logging camp in Gabon
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My name is Etienne Bourel. I'm a PhD candidate in anthropology in university Lyon 2. I want to thank organizers to give me an occasion to speak to you today. My thesis is relative to how people work and live on logging camp in Gabon and to transformations in forestry economic sector according to sustainable development, since few years. In this paper, I'm going to approach some social relationship modalities on Gabonese's logging camp through clientelism and paternalism concepts. Regarding to the context I'm going to describe, it will not be exact to consider these concepts in a straight link with social relationship from which they emerge. Moreover, they arise in a metaphoric and pragmatic way (Rorty, 2007), and from my standpoint. Indeed, it's difficult to envisage "patrons-clients relations" to be, as such, structuring dimensions of Gabonese society, as it is more common to vision in Mediterranean societies (Gellner et Waterbury, 1977), for instance. I will start by explaining forestry in a historical perspective and give some general elements of kinship relations in Gabon. Then I will return to different ethnographic situations and stories collected during interviews to finally try to show how the social relations of the Gabonese forest sites are specific and how the current context of the sustainable development tends to modulate it.

In Gabon, logging began more than a century ago. At the end of the 19th century, was discovered a quasi-endemic wood species with very good technical qualities: okoume. It grows up quickly and it floats, so you can easily carry logs via waterways and then to sawmill. Furthermore, you can unroll okoume to produce plywood. Thus, this economic activity covered a considerable importance in the Gabonese twentieth century. Until the seventies, it accounted for about 80% of exports and nearly 70% of GDP (Mouanga, 2008). In the twenties and thirties, an excitement stirred the country, especially in the colonial areas, due to the enrichment arising from the use of okoume

perspectives. At this time, appears the expression "okoume king" and the tree took place among the armorial bearings, in which it still is (Bouet, 1980).

The importance of logging, through its flagship species, was not only symbolic. Indeed, if logging began near the Atlantic coast, it has gradually moved to the hinterland. During the second part of the twentieth century, emerged the log transport problem, and incidentally the one of supply forest sites. For this, roads were created. Some of them now are the main communication ways in the country. It should be notice that if these roads opened up villages, it was a secondary consequence of the desire to increase the ability to extract wood from the forests. Thus, it is possible to consider that the Gabon road landscape is the result of a modeling related to logging (Ombigath, 2005). This process is one characteristic of the "diachronic inversion" about Gabonese state construction. In contrast to what has been happening in Europe, the organization of space is not the result of social transformations but instead generated them (Pourtier 1989: 10).

Indeed, as in most parts of the French colonial empire named "French Equatorial Africa" large areas of what is now the territory of Gabon were awarded to private contractors through concessions. In consideration of tax preferences, they were tasked to develop the territory. In fact, far from all controls, these colonial enterprises produced raw materials at minimal cost and had the support of an allied military administration. Authoritarian recruitments took place in villages to carry out forced labor. Occasionally, some workers I met agree to tell me, briefly, memories from their grandparents. They explained me this time when workers had to eat only cassava and salt (for cardiac voltage) and during which one, when one of them was exhausted, others had to dug a hole before sticking a hook in his neck so that he collapses. During the first decades of the 20th century, okoume logs were sawn by hand. They were transported to the river with poles pushed by the shoulders. So they regularly broke the collarbone.

During the twentieth century, techniques improve and mechanization took place more and more important in all phases of logging. Tendentiously, working conditions improve too. A failover occurs notably in 1946 with the abolition of forced labor. This leads to the requirement for contractors to promise substantial compensation (relative to wages earned by Gabonese at the time, of course) so that workers continue to remain in forestry. Different characteristic aspects of the current logging situation arose: the idea that forestry workers are men who have "money" because they work in the forest and therefore spend their money on time, when they come to town. In addition, the difficulty of their task is supposed to provide them a good pay (there is actually a regular gap between the promises of employers, workers expect and what they finally earn). From

the time of forced labor and workers' requisition remains the mobility of workers in the national space: their career usually takes the form of a flow through Gabon, thanks to the opening a new project, opportunity or appeal of one of their former bosses that they tend to trust and which ensures a good job. In these forest concessions, the director and the site chief are all-powerful figure characters. The camps are usually cleared areas, workers cases are built around the central office, the place where power is and where you can find, enthroned, country and company flags. Logging camps look like caricatures of Bentham's panopticons and those who direct them perform their power especially through the public use of their masculinity and sexuality.

Nowadays, all the Gabon territory is open to logging. Nearly all surfaces considered as viable for exploitation by Water and Forests Ministry are allocated to companies in the form of 25 years renewable concessions. If there is no more call in the morning, as it was done during military time, it's popular in Gabon to consider forest camps as places where "you must be ready any times." Such as forest workers are highly mobile, it is very common to find people from all parts of the country. Generally, anthropologists and linguists consider that there are between forty and sixty languages in Gabon, a country of about one million and a half people. Thus, it is very common to find on a less than one hundred workers forest site more than fifteen languages spoken in addition to French, which is still the lingua franca by the way. Furthermore, in terms of kinship, many commonalities unite Gabonese in organizations they know in their respective villages. While the country's main river, the Ogooue, separates patrilineal and matrilineal ethno-linguistic groups between the north and the south (Mayer, 1992), the general organization of social groups in Gabon is based on the principle of clans and lineages (Bonhomme, 2007) and a gerontocracy power stateless. We can notice that the idea of lineage have to be understood in a dynamic and political sense and can accept forms of subordination as idea of "lineage-client." During the colonial period, French missionaries wanted to convert to Catholicism. So now, the majority of the Gabonese population is Christian. But, since few years, current forms from of Protestantism such as Awake churches are very influential, thanks to their ability to integrate witchcraft speeches (Mary, 2009).

I just can give here a few scattered elements rather than a mature reflection but these aspects allow considering the growing importance of symbolic kinship between workers. A very significant number of hierarchical relationships are expressed in the form of kinship, particularly through words such as "father" and "son." It is possible to see a way using euphemisms to speak about forms of domination, but it also give to these relations an unsurpassable character.

During my fieldwork, I was in a logging company, "Olam", with various concessions in eastern Gabon, around the city of Makokou. In this quite unindustrialized area, the arrival of an important company as "Olam" in 2009 was a godsend. Hundreds of workers were hired, placing this in the characteristic interstitial status of forest workers: having the chance to be employed and, at the same time, undergoing a strong domination. This company was a subsidiary of "Olam International", a Singapore-based Indian multinational boasting to be the world leader in agro-food material. Logging is a very little part of their activities and direction is largely delegated to the French for their historical knowledge about behavior in Gabon. Thus, CEOs I knew worked in the capital, Libreville, but the executive directors and their subordinates were all in Makokou or region.

Spending work times with executive directors allowed me to understand how they exploited common forms of symbolic kinship in order to maintain their power. Thus, during a morning of spring 2011, I was in the forest. The Executive Director, who was regularly mentioned in public by workers as their "father", was touring machines (bulldozers and tractors) with the chief engineer to check their condition. Then they stopped lending to one and discuss with workers using this machine. One workers explained to him difficulties encountered in his personal life in view to get a salary advance. Without answering directly, the director so began to speak to everyone remembering that no one here earned lot of money but, even so, that it was important to thanks God for the great chance to have a job. It was true that this director used to go to the Makokou Catholic church on Sunday where he found himself praying with other workers of the company. After that, the worker who had made the request could only approve shyly what the director said was true.

While the director was returning with the chief engineer, I stayed with the worker and his assistant. This one showed me the mushrooms he had picked in the morning and which he had hidden in hearing the Director four-wheel drive because he could take it. These are common ways to behave on Gabonese forest camps: as workers are every day in the forest, they have some knowledge of the ecosystem and they regularly bring different forest products such as fruits, mushrooms or bark for infusions or treatment. It should be noted that, in forest concessions taking into account sustainable development, they do not have the right to hunt or set traps. This essentially means that they are now almost forced to eat imported frozen chicken with hormones... So if workers can improve their lives by collecting fees and free forest products, it is strategic for them to give a part to their superiors, when it's not them who deduct a part directly.

Here we address a crucial point of Gabonese forest sites relationship. Indeed, the gift is a primarily way to maintain good hierarchical relationships. When a worker starts working in a forestry

company, he usually hasn't any experience. He starts at the bottom of the hierarchy, as maneuver and is thus a laborer assistant. If he wants to improve his situation and become himself laborer and, may be, team leader or site chief, should the laborer with whom he work to transmit his knowledge. Maneuvers and laborers so enter in a dyadic relation and called each other "son in work" and "father in work". During this period, the maneuver assists the laborer, as he should do, but he also substitutes him in his work at the end of working days, in view to learn. In addition, it is fashionable for maneuver to offer a beer to his master when the work is done. What laborers don't admit easily is the fact that the maneuvers, for sure poorly paid regarding other wages in the company, must also provide a few thousand CFA their masters each times they get paid. Moreover, the best way for a maneuver to be "classified" (the term meaning "become laborer") one day, is to think also about giving some bills to the supervisor because he's the only one to have the power to grant him a new position, generally after laborer's recommendation .

According to the laborer's goodness or badness but also to the company's context, maneuvers remain more or less time in the subordinate position. It takes at least a few months to be classified. In talking with elderly workers, it seems that these types of relationships are less harsh than before. When they started to work, some workers had to wash their master clothes and the ones of their wives, prepare food for them and give large sums. Today, these forms of enslavement are not as pronounced but still remain the main pattern between maneuvers and laborers. When they take a break, some workers eat, others eat less, some of them laugh, and others can only occasionally speak.

In recent years, the implementation of sustainable development policies in major companies in the country modulates these forms of social relations. In forestry, these policies are referred to under the umbrella term of "sustainable forest management". To follow the example of fellers' group, they now receive training named "Reduced Impact Logging." These one-week courses are designed to teach them a number of techniques that make work operations more secure, less painful for the body and increasing profitability by optimizing the cubic-meter volume exploitable on each felled tree. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge does not pass only through custom links. The counterpoint is that courses are generally from European trainers who come from Europe to Gabon to teach workers. Technology was and is still owned by white people. One morning while I was in forest, a feller looked a can. It was a plastic container divided into two parts for transport at the same time in a single object oil and gasoline needed to operate a chainsaw. Until recently, workers had to carry two cans all day long. He looked at the container and told me that, really, "Whites are strong". A few days later, during an interview he explained that forest workers are "misfits" because they are

workers who have failed at school and in the administration, site of the writing and of the power in its colonial forms. If other workers did not show that in a so fatalistic way, they could not offer a competing political discourse but simply express some kind of Afrocentric ideas highlighting, for example, that the world's first university was established in Egypt, so in Africa .

A few days before the end of my fieldwork, during April this year, I met the executive director of the company driving of his four-wheel drive. It was the last time we met each other. He told me, as a way to show me some fragments of "hidden transcript" of his social group (Scott, 1990), that if the Olam leaders produced efforts in Sustainable Forest Management way, it was mainly for visibility reasons, in view to obtain eco-certification labels and assert moral among consumers. But basically they did not care if, every year, two workers died during logging operations. Anyway, hundreds of people wanted to work in their business.

Ultimately, we can conceive that, by enlightening visibility issue in the multinationals production system, sustainable development refresh the public space issue and, somehow, allows workers to move from an inhumanistic system to a more humanistic one. Nowadays, every consumer can potentially know the GPS position of the tree from which was produced the board he bought in a hardware store. And forestry workers go nowadays to work with boots, helmets and protections. They pay for their retirement and are supported when they have a work accident. In obverse, French people, who colonized Gabon, are revalued symbolically, through the technology they continue to bring. Moreover, in a context of global crisis in the timber sector, wage employment is scarce and employees are well aware about how much their situation is precarious, regarding to the large number of people wanting to take their place. According to the current values in Gabon, the employment is nevertheless one of the few ways of acquiring an autonomous form of decency and respectability, as building his own house. Following Achille Mbembe's reflections (2003), we are so still in a necropolitical pattern in Gabonese logging camps. Power holders, whatever their hierarchical position ultimately; resemble sovereigns having the right of life and death over their subjects. As Elsa Dorlin (2006) shown, and we can also understand with Jean Baudrillard (1998), the creation and maintenance of a speech differentiating people according to race, gender and class is intrinsic to the functioning of the capitalist system. Technical objects which seem to be objective in appearance, and power so attributed to their inventors and owners are some of the best example. In Gabon, "the father's smell" is still pregnant...

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